



## The Social Impacts of Rural In-Migration on Ohio Agriculture and Communities at the Rural/Urban Interface

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**Understanding the challenges for agricultural communities on the fringe of metropolitan areas** is a very important issue in Ohio. Since 1970, the populations in the fringe counties of Ohio's three largest metropolitan areas—Columbus, Cleveland-Akron, and Cincinnati-Hamilton—have grown 54.9 percent. Identifying ways to build social relations and community among farmers and newcomers (nonfarmers) moving to the country is essential in order to reduce or eliminate potential conflict.

Data from face-to-face interviews and a mail survey of residents in an eight-township, three-village region in northwestern Licking County were collected. Licking County is part of the Columbus metropolitan area, has substantial agricultural production within the county, and has grown nearly 10 percent in the past 10 years.

## OBJECTIVES

Identify and measure the social and cultural impacts of rapid population growth on rural community life and agriculture at Ohio's urban fringe. Identify how social relationships among farmers and nonfarmers impact community involvement, support for local agriculture, and tolerance of various agricultural practices.

## CHALLENGES

Identify ways to develop social relations among newcomers at the rural-urban interface and identify what contributes to reduced conflict and greater support for agriculture among newcomers (nonfarmers).

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Analysis of the mail survey showed that long-term residents (more than 10 years) had stronger social connections within the community and were more actively involved in the community. The analysis also revealed these longtime residents were more supportive of local agriculture and more tolerant of agriculture in the community than newer residents who did not interact with farmers.

It was determined that social relations between farmers and longtime and newcomer nonfarm residents are related to attitudes about the community and local agriculture. Nonfarmers who reported that they trusted neighboring farmers also showed greater support and tolerance of local agriculture. The results indicate that farmers who invest in social relations with nonfarm neighbors help to improve the attitudes of nonfarmers toward agriculture and reduce the level of agricultural annoyances and inconveniences reported by nonfarmers.

Results indicate that one of the most important factors influencing trust and nonfarmer support of agriculture is simply nonfarmers knowing adjoining farm neighbors. Open houses and farm tours have a more modest impact on nonfarmer trust and support.

## THE FUTURE

Additional funding in the amount of \$119,658 has been awarded to the researcher and a colleague within the School of Natural Resources to continue this research with plans to submit proposals for additional studies in multiple areas of the state.

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photo courtesy USDA

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